When the Little Old Lady Spoke

BY

ANNA McFARLANE.

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When the Little Old Lady Spoke

A Missionary Play.

By Anna McFarlane.

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ELDRIDGE ENTERTAINMENT HOUSE,

FRANKLIN, OHIO - DENVER, COLO.

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CHARACTERS

MRS. WILLISON—Wife of the missionary to Bucaramanga, Colombia.
BOY—Age five, her son.
BABY—Supposedly in the cradle on stage rear, left.
MARIA—Native servant woman to the Willison family.
ISABELLA—A native, a very old woman, decrepit.
ROSINA—A native, quite a young woman.
The president of the Missionary society.
The members of the society as follows:
MRS. DOZEY
MRS. QUAGG
MISS FUMBLE
MISS DULIP
MRS. PARKINS
MRS. RUNDLE
MRS. TIMS
THE LITTLE OLD LADY

In Three Scenes:

I. Bucaramanga, Colombia, S. A.

II. Any small town in Minnesota.

III. A Mountain Cabin in Colombia.

Time: The Present.

Suggestious

During the first half of the first scene, up to the entrance of Rosina, any Spanish air may be softly strummed on a guitar back of the scenes.

The small fire in the last scene may be imitated by the use of a large electric flashlight, covered with red and orange paper and a few small sticks. With a single lighted candle, rear of stage this should be the only light for this scene.

The name of the state used in the second and third scenes may be changed to fit the locality where the play is being given.

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When the Little Old Lady Spoke.

SCENE I.

The living room of the Willison's, missionaries to Bucaramanga. The room is in confusion as it is another moving-day in the life of this nomad family. Packing boxes, a trunk, suit cases, etc., line the walls. Two children, a boy of five and one of three, are playing with blocks on the floor—pretending to pack them. At a table near the window at rear of stage, Mrs. Willison is sorting papers, etc. She is a young woman, small, fragile, her sweet face unnaturally lined with anxiety and the troubles of other people. From the door r. enters Maria, a native, in characteristic costume. She is voluble, volcanic, extravagant in her devotion to the family—she talks with her hands as much as with her mouth.

Maria—Ah, Senora, the packing now of everything in the kitchens is complete, and lo, behold, stupid Maria has packed too the bread, the coffee, the cake and nothing is there for the Senora, for the good Doctor, for the blessed bambinos to eat! Not even so much as one red pepper—no! Ah, Senora, and I know not where I have put anything.

Mrs. W.—Never mind, Maria, the ox cart will be here soon to take all our things to the other house and we'll just wait and have luncheon when we get there.

Maria—And below in the patio is another stupid one to bother the Senora when she is busy—they give us no peace!

Mrs. W.—But Maria, bring her up at once!

Maria—The Senora will die of being too kind but I will bring her, the stupid, up! *(Exit.)*

(Mrs. W. continues her work until Isabella, an old woman in ragged black, leaning on a stick, enters.)

Mrs. W.—Isabella! It is good to see you. Sit here—there—you are tired. You walked too fast!

Isabella—They tell me, Senora—is it true?—say

that it is not true!—that you are going away—away, where I will not see you!

Mrs. W.—Only across the city to another house, Isabella.

Isabella—I will not see you then—I can not walk so far. For just these few weeks you have talked to me of things I did not know and now you are going away! Are you not happy in this house?

Mrs. W—.O, Isabella! We have been in fifteen houses since we came to Bucaramanga eight years ago—fifteen! This is the best of them all—the yard for the children, the lovely garden and trees, the cool big rooms—but Senor Castellano only gave us his house while he was away. Tomorrow he comes home so we must go.

Isabella—Could you not have a house of your own? Ah, Senora—I am old, listen not to me—but the women, the men, all about I hear them talk; how you are good! What you have done for them—what the good Doctor has done—teaching them, helping them, comforting them! All these people kiss your feet, Senora—begging you to stay.

Mrs. W.—Listen, Isabella—you are old—you have known sorrow—you know what it is to want things that never come. For eight years we have been asking the people at home to send us money to build a mission, a home, in the center of the town like this house—where we might always stay to teach and help—where the people might always find us if they were in trouble. But the money does not come and we have gone from house to house as the owners would give them to us for two, three, six months! Now there is no house to go to but one—Oh, Isabella, if we could only stay here! I am afraid—

(*Enter Maria*)

Maria—A woman in the patio and will not go away, though I say the Senora is occupied. *(The five-year-old boy runs out to see who it is.)* I would not trouble the Senora.

Mrs. W.—Bring her in Maria. *(Exit Maria.)*

Isabella—I see the Senora has trouble—I would lie

in the dust for the Senora and the good Doctor as would all the people—but money I have none, Senora!

Mrs. W— I know that too well. *(Goes with Isabella to the door.)* Maria will find some milk for you—I shall come to see you, Isabella.

Isabella—I kiss your hands, Senora, I kiss your feet. Come then soon. Adios! *(Exit.)*

Boy—(Running in.) It is the lady who cried, mother, who cried so hard.

(Rosina enters. She is the dark, tragic, Spanish type. Whereas Maria is an active volcano, Rosina is smoldering.)

Rosina—(Falling to her knees.) Senora—I kiss your feet!

Mrs. W.—Son, help Maria find milk and bread and bring for Rosina. *(Boy goes out.)* Rosina ,where have you been all these months? Your baby—

Rosina—Yes, yes—one night, those months ago, my baby sick—very sick—I run quickly for the Senora through the streets but your house is dark, no light as you keep it in the window—but I knock and knock—I beat my head on that door and no one answer me.

Mrs. W.—My poor Rosina!

Rosina—I go home—my poor little baby sick, very sick! I think perhaps he die. I go in the morning to your house and knock again. A very cross man come to say you are gone he knows not where. I cry to him that my baby die and he shut the door. Why do you leave that house, Senora?

Mrs. W.—The owner came back before we expected him—we left very hurriedly—ten months ago! My poor Rosina, could no one tell you where we were?

Rosina—I ask and ask so they think me crazy. The priest say to me that you go away far to come back no more and my baby die!

Mrs. W.—I should have hunted for you!

Rosina—The priest say you have killed my baby—ah, Senora, I know that is not so—and the priest say that baby damned because of no baptism! There is no place to bury that little baby—the priest ask for money, then more money and I can not find it. I am sick with

fear for my little baby to be damned and the priest ask all the time for money. I could not find you, Senora—till today I was sick so I could not look for you. Now at last—

Mrs. W.—Look at me, Rosina. That was not true what the priest told you about the dear baby—not true, do you hear?

Rosina—(Repeating after her.) Not true!

Mrs. W.—Have you forgotten all I taught you?

Rosina—No, no, Senora—just to see you, to hear it again! Now I know, yes—I remember. I kiss your feet, Senora—I go now because I have found work in Perlita's shop on the plaza but I will come back.

Mrs. W.—Yes, you must come very often but we are leaving this house today.

Rosina—Leaving?

Mrs. W.—Yes, moving again. Dr. Willison is there now, preparing the house. I wish we weren't going.

Rosina—Where do you go, Senora?

Mrs. W.—See, I will write it down for you—at the foot of the City Hill, the last street—

Rosina—(Horrified.) The last street, Senora?

Mrs. W.—Yes, just above the stream.

Rosina—That is not a stream, Senora!

Mrs. W.—No, it is not.

Rosina—The gutters from the city run into that ditch!

Mrs. W.—Yes, yes, I know, Rosina—but it is the only house in the city we could get—the last house on the street—I will write it.

Rosina—(Whispers in terror) The house of Rodriguez!

(Enter boy with milk and bread for Rosina. Maria with her arms filled with boxes.)

Maria—The man with the ox-cart is at the door and already have I loaded it with boxes—so high—and the man wishes to know where he is to go.

Mrs. W.—(With her back to Maria—her voice heavy with anxiety.) To the Casa del Rodriguez.

Maria—(Drops boxes with a clatter.) Senora—then we do not go where the boxes go?

Mrs. W.—Yes, Maria. Doctor Willison is there now, getting the house ready for us.

Maria—Senora—but—the house of Rodriguez—where they die—it is accursed—the people cover their faces when they go by! There is every disease there and below it is the great gutter of the city. We shall die—the Senora, the good doctor, the bambinos! Senora—no—tell me no—tell the man no! Senora! Senora!

Mrs. W.—Maria, you have your own family—if they would not want you to go, if you are afraid, you must not go. Dr. Willison has hunted over and over the city for weeks—there is nothing else. We must have a place to sleep— a place to teach! It is cleaned now and we will paint and scrub. My husband says we must not be afraid—but my dear Maria, when you have helped the man with the cart, you must go, then, back to stay with your family.

Maria—The Senora goes to the house of Rodriguez?

Mrs. W.—I must.

Maria—We shall die—it is accursed—but maybe the good Jesu—I will hurry, then, and begin to scrub!

CURTAIN

SCENE II.

A small town missionary society gathering for their monthly meeting. The president sits at a table at the left, facing several rows of chairs arranged up and down stage. Four or five members are present and others keep coming in throughout the scene until 15 or 20 are present and the chairs fairly well filled. The Little Old Lady, one of the first comers, sits in the back row. The costumes may be ridiculous as desired, although the general impression should be of well-fed, well-housed, easy-going, comfort-loving Americans—except for the Little Old Lady. Local color which can be added from any society's own experiences, would add greatly to the conversation of the missionary ladies. A piano left front.

President—Ladies, though there are so few here, I think it best we'd come to order.

(Mrs. Dozey and Mrs. Quagg, sitting together in the second row, exchange recipes.)

Mrs. Dozey—Yes, only one egg, Mrs. Quagg. *(All the ladies interested.)*

Mrs. Quagg—Is that both yolk and white, Mrs. Dozey?

President—Ladies, please come to order.

Mrs. Dozey—(Before settling down to order) Yes, and of course the shell for coffee.

President—We will open with a hymn but we'll sing without the organ as I don't see any one here who can play. *(Several ladies look hurt, among them Miss Dulip, who attracts the president's attention.)* Oh, yes, *(resigned)* Miss Dulip, will you play? Number 3. *(They sing rather badly "On Calvary's Brow," or any other hymn.)* We will leave the Scripture reading and the business as so few are here and begin with the program.

Miss Fumble—Well, I know Mrs. Tims is coming, because she's to be hostess.

Miss Dulip—I saw Mrs. Wilkins down street and she said she'd of come if anybody'd taken the trouble to call her up. She was quite hurt.

Miss Fumble—Neither Mrs. Bing or Mrs. Tuttles will come because they're mad at each other and each one's afraid the other will be here.

Mrs. Dozey—Mrs. Sleeper wants us to change to an evening meeting because she can't get her work done in time to come.

Mrs. Quagg—Yes, an' Mrs.—

President—(Interrupting.) We must go on ladies—we'll decide all those things next meeting. Mrs. Perkins will read her paper, "What We Have Done for India."

Mrs. Parkins—(Rises slowly from her place near the back row, drops most of her papers as she walks to the front, collects them and finally lays them out on the table—though they seem to be in great disorder as she can never just lay her hand on the notes she wants. She has

a habit of pausing to look over her glasses at her audience.) I *(Long search through papers)* I couldn't find much about this subject—my husband said he thought it was a very foolish subject for the committee to give. *(One member of the committee has just come in. Two of the others beckon to her and relate in whispers what has been said. They are much hurt and do not pay much attention to the speaker after this.)* India is a very interesting country—very. The inhabitants number—now I think I have the exact number here somewhere—yes, 9,450—9,450 inhabitants. *(startled)* Oh, no, no—that is sects! Well I thought that was a very interesting fact—9,450 sects. They are scattered all over the country in different parts, mostly in the south. *(She uses a long pointer, displaying a map on the wall behind her, but her ideas of the geography of the country are vague.)* The climate of India is very warm, very warm, which may account for, but certainly does not excuse the disgraceful way the people go around—just disgraceful! And men who write books on India seem to take the greatest pleasure in taking pictures of these people. It should be stopped. I brought one to show you which I will pass around. *(She has difficulty finding the right picture)* Now I wanted to read to you ladies a little piece I found—*(search is vain this time)* well, I can't find it just now but I may come to it—I wanted to say that the most dreadful thing is this about child widows! It is really dreadful! Why you've no idea how hard it is for those poor children. They certainly do have a hard time! There are two main rivers in India, the Ganges and the—well, the Ganges is the main river. That's where they throw all the children, you know. It certainly should be stopped. I think it is dreadful—dreadful *(trying to cover pause as she searches the hopelessly mixed pages of her notes)* Now there are very few people that I would call Christians in India—*(finds paper)* Oh, here it is—population 300,000,000 and this is the name of the river, Irawadi, queer isn't it? And here is a name Rat—*(looks closely)* Rat-na-jira—I don't know why I put that down. It's a town—yes, a town in India. It's such an interesting country—and such queer names. Oh,

here is the piece I wanted to read—*(Reads, stumblingly, as though it was entirely new to her, some inappropriate poem or paragraph—for instance some of the most abstruse stanzas of the Rubaiyat)* I just wish you could all read all the books I've read—I know you would enjoy it as much as I have. *(Collects papers and returns in great satisfaction to her seat. Other ladies clap mildly)*

President—Thank you, Mrs. Parkins, I'm sure we've all been impressed with the amount of time you've put on your paper. A most helpful talk.

Mrs. Rundle—Did you mention Rat-na-jiri, Mrs. Parkins?

Mrs. Parkins—(Looks hastily through her papers) Yes—yes, I did.

Mrs. Rundle—Well, I have here a package of picture post-cards and I've had them for some time and I'd be thankful if some one would tell me what is to be done with them. Someone in some queer place wanted them —though for what I can't imagine—and I was to send them but I've forgotten where. I thought it might be this Rats-in-jira.

Miss Fumble—I thought they were to go to the Freedman.

Miss Dulip—No, those were the old magazines and rubbers.

Mrs. Quagg—I remember we had a letter about them.

President—If the secretary would only come we could find out.

Mrs. Quagg—Well, I move that we put off sending them till next month. Wherever they're going I guess they can wait for them another month.

Mrs. Rundle—From what I know of the missionaries, they're never satisfied—soon as you get through raising money for one thing they want it for something else. If we send 'em post-cards, why next month they'll want some more so I say wait till next month and save that much postage.

(As all the ladies are murmuring approval of this speech, Mrs. Tims enters loaded with baskets of refreshments, rear r.)

Mrs. Tims—My land, thought I'd never get here! Gracious, but what a big meeting! I only counted on twelve. This is the worst society I ever saw—seems though sometimes people come just to plague you when you haven't enough refreshments.

Mrs. Dozey—I've noticed that.

President—Mrs. Tims, we've been waiting for the treasurer's report. Will you give it now.

Mrs. Tims—*(Fumbles in one of her baskets)* Well, there, I declare, I can't find it. But I remember we don't owe anything, we're all paid up and have five dollars in the contingent fund.

Mrs. Quagg—I never could see through that contingent fund.

Mrs. Tims—Well, it's been explained to you enough times.

President—It's good we've so much money because we're being asked for something extra.

Mrs. Tims—There, wouldn't you know it—just the minute we're paid up! *(Murmurs of disapproval and indignation throughout the society.)*

President—Well, this is called Minnesota Special—I don't understand it much, but I gather that they want to buy a lot and put up a house for some missionary in Buc—good gracious! —Buc-ar-a-manga in South Americe. Let's see Wilfrid's the name—no—Willison—and the ladies of Minnesota are to do it.

Mrs. Tims—And why Minnesota, I'd like to know?

Mrs. Dozey—House and lot! If these missionaries would economize a little and rent some cozy little flat we wouldn't have to be everlastingly sacrificing, ourselves.

Miss Dulip—O, yes, missionaries have to have everything—hired girls and carriages and now house and lot —they'll be wanting airplanes next.

President—Well, we don't need to pay our share, I suppose, if we don't want to. We can just write and suggest that they wait for another year.

Mrs. Quagg—Yes, building's so high. I think they ought to wait till after the war anyway.

Miss Fumble—Yes, just write and tell them to be contented where they are 'till after the war.

The Little Old Lady—(whose sweet old face is vaguely troubled. Rises slowly from her chair.) Madam President—could I say a word or two. I know I'm old and not as smart at seeing through things as you young folks, but after you spoke about some special money that was wanted for some people in South America, I got to thinking and I didn't hear much what you other ladies said. Most of us take lots of pleasure in using our imaginations about people in books or in pictures or on street cars. I do, I know, and sometimes I get to imagining about missionaries! Now, that word, "Special," sort of scares me—it usually means something mighty important, something you've got to hurry with, and so I've been imagining those missionaries down in South America where Mrs. Tims told us last month, it's so hot, and the people so dirty and eating such queer things—and I can just see that little missionary woman maybe longing for a clean house of her own and a nice yard where the children can play—missionaries always have children—maybe there are no flats to rent and maybe they're living in one of those hot, dirty houses with the sun beating down and no friends of their own kind to talk to or things they like to eat, and maybe the children get sickly—and I can see that missionary man not knowing which to do, go on serving the Lord, giving his life to Him, or to leave the work and come back here with his wife and children where everybody has clean houses and yards! So, ladies, when missionaries ask for something and ask for it "Special" why it sort of scares me and I just wouldn't dare to buy a new bonnet—though I've worn this one seven years— I'd be afraid if I did perhaps those little sickly children might get worse—perhaps that little missionary woman who's watching every day for a letter from home bringing the money—perhaps she would get to thinking we'd forgotten her. So, here's the money for my bonnet, ladies, and I want you to send that whether you send the rest or not.

President—Well, I don't know what to do, ladies. *(Two or three of the members are plainly sniffing.)*

Mrs. Tims—My land, I guess we can raise that money, now we've got a start.

Miss Dulip—Yes, we can collect old magazines.

Miss Fumble—There's lots of money in old rubber.

(Amid general enthusiasm on ways and means for raising money the curtain goes down.)

CURTAIN

SCENE III.

It is night in the mountain cabin. Rough tables and chairs, of bamboo, if possible. Against the rear wall, dimly shown, is a cot and Mrs. Willison lying as if utterly weary. At the front r. over a small fire are crouched Rosina and Maria. A door at l. opens outdoors, one at r. on another room. Rosina and Maria speak in hushed voices, rather frightened.

Maria—Ah, Rosina, but yes—yesterday you said Manana and the day before yesterday you said Manana, and the day before that, Manana—and today Manana—but each day the Senora is worse. Ah, I tell by the doctor's face it is so! And some day it will be too late, there will be no Manana for the Senora! No, for here the heart is sick—and in her eyes yet are tears for the bambino in Bucaramanga. Ah, Rosina, what do you think—there was no baptism!

Rosina—It makes no difference, Maria—the Senora told me so—now her baby and my little baby are together, happy.

Maria—Ah, maybe so—but the good doctor only sits with his head in his hands and the boy asks him to play, he is so lonely. Oh, I could cry to see them, Rosina. Do you think those people in that North America are good, Rosina? Tell me—if they are good would they let the Senora go to that house of Rodriguez *(Both women shudder)* would they let that baby die—do they care that the Senora is sick with fever—that the doctor closed his school to bring us here to the mountain where the air is good?

Rosina—Ah, that journey—the bad road—those

wicked burros who stumble, stumble! My poor back is very sick.

Maria—Yes—but the dear Senora who said not a word, not a little moan, though her hand held tight to the good doctor—If they are good, do they leave the Senora to die because the heart is sick, tell me?

Rosina—I know not, Maria—perhaps Manana will be a new day.

Maria—(Impatiently) Manana!

(A tapping noise at the window. Both women are startled.)

Rosina—I will go to see—stay you, the doctor said to not leave the Senora. *(Exit* 1.*)*

Mrs. W.—(Tired, faint voice.) Maria! *(Maria runs to the cot.)*

Mrs. W.—Is there no word from home? *(Maria silent)* They have forgotten. They have so much! My poor boys—are they asleep, Maria?

Maria—The good doctor and the boy sleep in the next room. Will I call them, Senora?

Mrs. W.—No, no, it is good that they sleep.

Rosina—(Enters. Motions Maria front where they whisper.) A boy from the town, with this and already he sleeps on the floor—such a journey! A letter he said for the doctor.

Maria—It is not in looks like a letter—so yellow.

Rosina—The boy said, "Give to the doctor now."

Maria—Ah me, ah me, I know not if I should wake the good doctor. I like not these yellow things. I am afraid, Rosina—it is dark on the mountain—hear the wind!

Rosina—But the boy was told not to stop 'till he gave the yellow thing to the doctor.

Maria—Would it be best for me to open and read? Oh, I know not, I know not.

Mrs. W.—Maria! *(Both women start, terrified)* Maria, what is it?

Maria—(Unable to keep from telling her) It is a boy with a message for the good doctor—I know not if I should wake him, Senora!

Mrs. W.—No. Come near where I can see.

Rosina—It is a yellow thing.

Mrs. W.—Not a letter! *(Puts out her hand for it)*

Maria—Do not trouble, Senora, it will wait till Manana when the good doctor wakes.

Mrs. W.—Bring the candle, Rosina. Open, Maria—maybe it will not wait for manana! Now read—do not tremble—read carefully.

Maria—(On her knees by the cot, facing Mrs. W., while Rosina holds the candle back of her. Maria reads painfully.) "Doctor Williams, Bucaramanga—One thousand —dollars—forwarded—today—for lot—money for house—pledged—work—must go—on—we are behind you—God—bless—you—

"Minnesota Society."

(Pause.)

Maria—Is it good, Senora?

Mrs. W.—Yes, my Maria, very good—I thought maybe it would be too late but no, now I shall get well—it is a stone off my heart!

Maria—Do not cry—I will call the good doctor.

Mrs. W.—No, let him sleep. I cry because my heart is light—Oh, I shall get well, Maria. Those people are good, they are very good.

Maria—They are slow!

Rosina—(Pointing to growing light outdoors.) See, already it is Manana!

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